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Chairman: Mr. Maitland ..... (South Africa)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 79: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/57/21, A/57/157)

1. **Mr. Fallouh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the United Nations in general and the Department of Public Information in particular were responsible for promoting the Organization's voice internationally and clarifying its objectives and activities. The positions of Member States with regard to major international issues should be published. Focusing on issues reflected in United Nations resolutions should also become an essential part of United Nations information efforts, particularly with regard to resistance to foreign occupation.

2. His delegation welcomed the efforts of the United Nations to strengthen its web site, and stressed the need to achieve complete parity between the six official languages and the equitable allocation of financial and human resources among them, in addition to the issuance of publications in all those languages. It affirmed the need to consult the Committee on Information before restructuring the Department of Public Information or reorganizing its priorities, and stressed that such measures should not modify the mandates and activities approved by the General Assembly.

3. His delegation was concerned about the intention of the Department of Public Information to increase its partnership with non-governmental media organizations in order to disseminate United Nations information, since some such organizations could be biased. His delegation affirmed the necessity to comply with General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of February 1946. It also affirmed the necessity of preserving the independence of the resources and administration of the special information programme on the question of Palestine. Furthermore, any name change for that programme should receive the approval of the General Assembly.

4. **Mr. Trepelkov** (Russian Federation) welcomed the increasingly substantive and constructive consideration of information issues by the General Assembly and the Organization's efforts to strengthen its public information and communication activities, which were an important means of shaping national and international public opinion. The Department of Public Information should continue its efforts to enhance the coordination and effectiveness of communications within the United Nations system.

5. On the whole his delegation supported the Secretary-General's recommendations for the strengthening of United Nations public information activities. It welcomed the increasing acknowledgement by all United Nations departments of the role of public information in implementing substantive programmes. The new operational pattern for the Department's activities proposed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/157) would enhance the impact of the Department's work, which should focus on dissemination of essential information, within the framework of the agreed strategy. Its priorities should reflect the priorities of the Charter and the Millennium Declaration: the maintenance of international peace and security, conflict prevention, combating international terrorism, and peacekeeping. He noted the rapid response of the Department to the tragic events of 11 September 2001, with the creation of a page in all six languages on the United Nations web site to provide information on the Organization's efforts to address the global problem of combating international terrorism. His delegation had submitted a draft resolution on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security (A/C.1/57/L.1), which had already been approved by the First Committee; that document represented an important step towards legal regulation in the field of information and the creation of conditions for secure information exchange on an equal footing.

6. His delegation noted with interest the Department's efforts to develop the network of United Nations information centres and, while approving the initiative to establish regional information hubs, said that implementation of that plan should be gradual and take into account the opinions of the countries concerned and the needs of the regions involved, including the official languages used in those regions. The United Nations integrated office in Moscow provided information on the work of the United Nations system and coordinated the information efforts of other United Nations offices in the Russian Federation and was the most authoritative and accessible source of United Nations documents and publications in the Russian language. It also translated United Nations publications for dissemination to the public in both the Russian Federation and the

Commonwealth of Independent States. Those efforts should be taken into account when allocating resources to information centres.

7. The proposals to rationalize and improve the United Nations library system required careful consideration, in particular the proposals to transfer some of the functions of the United Nations libraries in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, of which there seemed to be insufficient justification. His delegation welcomed measures to prevent the fragmentation and duplication of publications and to place most documents on line and commended the Secretary-General's willingness to ensure that countries with limited access to the Internet were not adversely affected by the transformation to a digital information infrastructure; the capacity to produce hard copy documents should be maintained, as required.

8. Member States should be provided with services of identical quality and scope in all the working and official languages of the Organization; the time-tested principle of linguistic parity must be maintained. The international radio broadcasting pilot project in the six official languages should be continued and a permanent multilingual radio service should be established. He noted that the Russian language radio service was reaching an ever-growing audience and was broadcast not only in the Russian Federation but also in Belarus, Estonia, Uzbekistan and Finland. The six official languages must also receive equal treatment with regard to United Nations web sites; the Cyberschoolbus web site project was of particular interest.

9. **Mr. Kok Poh Fatt** (Singapore) recalled the importance of promoting awareness of the work of the Organization. Unfortunately, even in the host country, the United Nations was associated with negative and often false stereotypes, and was seen, albeit to a decreasing degree, as a bloated bureaucracy where diplomats engaged in negotiations that resulted in incomprehensible documents with little importance for people's day-to-day lives. Elsewhere in the world, even where people had a generally positive impression of the Organization, their knowledge of its real role was likely to be hazy at best.

10. For far too long, the Department of Public Information had suffered from a lack of direction due to the many mandates that Member States had thrust upon it; even after several reviews and a major restructuring exercise, it had difficulty in differentiating and prioritizing its messages and identifying its target audiences. The growing interdependency created by globalization had made the United Nations an indispensable institution for dialogue and for forging global consensus and action; it was essential that the Department of Public Information raise awareness of the Organization's good work in the areas of peace and security, peacekeeping, poverty eradication, development and many others. It must explain to the world the rationale and real purpose behind the Organization's various endeavours. Advances in information and communication technology must be used to achieve the widest possible outreach but radio, television and printed material should not be neglected, especially in view of the relatively low technology capacities of the developing world.

11. Significant strides had been made; for example, the United Nations web site, had clearly grown in importance, and was being enhanced continually in all the official languages. The Department's efforts to transmit daily news on the United Nations directly to journalists through the United Nations News Service were greatly appreciated; it was encouraging that the news service would soon be available in all the official languages. He also welcomed the introduction of live-broadcast radio programmes, which reached tens of millions of persons worldwide and were aired daily by many of the world's major broadcasters.

12. His delegation supported the plan to create a division of strategic communications within the Department of Public Information. The United Nations information centres played a vital role in raising awareness of the Organization and must be made more effective. He therefore supported the proposal to consolidate the information centres in regional hubs; that reorganization should, however, take due account of the circumstances and needs of the various countries and regions.

13. **Mr. Kennedy** (United States of America) said that his delegation looked forward to the comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department of Public Information but questioned the need for an additional three-year systematic evaluation of the Department's activities, in particular given the numerous recent reviews and reports on the Department's operations. The Department was already in a position to begin

implementation of meaningful and far-reaching reforms. His delegation looked forward to the report called for in draft resolution B (A/57/21, p. 12) on the feasibility of providing free, public access to the official document system and to the decision to be taken in that regard by the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. Programme managers must identify activities to be eliminated in order to shift resources to high-priority areas such as promoting the use of the six official languages on the United Nations web site, and improving the web site. While he recognized the qualities of the *United Nations Chronicle*, its cost was not justified in relation to its readership and impact; it should be eliminated in order to reallocate funding to web site enhancement.

14. He recalled that at the end of the main part of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, in December 2001, the Fifth Committee had decided to establish two new posts in the Department of Public Information. That decision had not been recommended by the Department or discussed in the Committee on Information, nor had it been considered by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions or the Committee for Programme and Coordination. That circumvention of normal procedure was particularly troubling in light of the reorientation of the Department currently under way.

15. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's efforts to rationalize the current ad hoc arrangement of United Nations information centres and offices around regional hubs and said the United Nations Houses and other system offices should also be included when establishing regional hubs. Presentation of a system-wide plan to restructure the information centres would allow for concessions to be made by countries in all regions, with the end result being a more efficient and effective information system which would better meet the needs of Member States. He noted in that context the excellent work of the Photo Unit in ensuring timely distribution of digital images of United Nations meetings.

16. It was regrettable that at the previous meeting the representative of Cuba had chosen to politicize the Committee's discussions. He stressed that his Government had always respected its international obligations, including International Telecommunication Union rules on avoidance of harmful interference with the services of other countries. For more than 40 years the Cuban people had been deprived of their right to freedom of opinion and information; the Cuban Government's alarm at initiatives such as the Proyecto Varela and Radio and Television Martí stemmed from its fear of the consequences of allowing its people to have free access to information about their own country and the world, a freedom to which all mankind was entitled.

17. **Mr. Linn Myaing** (Myanmar) said that as the twenty-first century began, the reduction of existing disparities in information flow at all levels remained one of the main challenges. In the view of Myanmar, that could be achieved by increasing assistance for the development of the communication infrastructure and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for the priorities of individual countries. Myanmar welcomed the decision to convene the World Summit on the Information Society; it also applauded the establishment of the Information Technology Service, the Health Inter-Network and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force.

18. As a country in transition, Myanmar was seeking to make use of the potential of information and communication technologies for economic and social development, while bearing in mind the inherent risks. In order to maintain national identity, unity and culture, public policies would need to be established that could counter the dangers posed by modern information technologies. His Government had established the Myanmar Computer Technology Development Council to formulate a national strategy for dealing with those important issues; it was also enacting a cyber law.

19. Myanmar recognized that education and the ability to use information and communication technologies were essential for the development of the country. E-education had been integrated into the educational system, and efforts had been made to transmit that technology to all Myanmar citizens. Television relay stations and other telecommunications aids had been set up to bring the border areas up to par with the rest of the country. Recent advances included the development of an information and communication technologies master plan, the opening of multimedia classrooms and e-learning centres at universities, colleges and high schools, the establishment of health information networks, the increased use of computer links by governmental and commercial bodies and the establishment of companies to augment e-mail capacity and provide wider Internet access.

20. At the regional level, Myanmar was cooperating with other ASEAN member States, and taking a leading role in efforts to ensure harmonious development in the area of information and communication technology within the context of the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement and the e-ASEAN task force and working groups. Two Malaysian organizations had conducted a cyber law workshop in August 2002, and arrangements were being made to hold a Korean-Myanmar e-Government conference.

21. **Mr. Al Rashedi** (United Arab Emirates) said that his Government attached great importance to the mass media, believing in freedom of speech within the framework of Islamic precepts. It had established eight satellite television stations that broadcast in several languages, and had provided modern communication tools to governmental agencies and schools, making the country among the top 20 Internet-users in the world. Dubai had become an important media and Internet centre. Furthermore, information technology exhibitions and conferences were held annually in the United Arab Emirates.

22. In order to ensure success in its information mission, the United Nations needed to fulfil the following conditions. When preparing the programme budget, priority consideration must be given to the political role of information activities and adequate resources must be made available to strengthen the Department of Public Information. Greater efforts must be made to ensure language parity among the six official languages on the web site and in publications; in that context, it was important to provide the necessary human and technical resources for the Arabic language. Information organizations should provide information and communication technologies to developing countries, in order to promote universal access to information and help develop human resources in those fields. An international code of ethics for information should be enacted, which would include free flow of information, objectivity and transparency, and respect for the religious beliefs and cultural heritage of peoples.

23. Recognizing the critical role of the media in promoting development, his delegation stressed the need to strengthen the activities of the Department of Public Information to publicize the Palestinian cause and the situation in the Middle East; those activities were vital in helping focus the world's attention on the suffering of the Palestinian people and their legitimate right to an independent State, with Al-Quds as its capital, and exposing Israel's violations of international law and human rights and its crimes against innocent civilians. His delegation found it regrettable that the Department of Public Information had slackened its efforts on the Palestinian question; it also deplored the delay in the arrival of Palestinian journalists to the United Nations to take part in the annual training programme, as that programme was very helpful to the Palestinian people, who had no access to the media and information technology in the occupied territories, given the repressive policies of the Israeli military forces.

24. **Ms. Miller** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the member Sates of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that information continued to be an indispensable tool for the economic and social development of States. The availability of current information technology remained, however, an indicator of the continuing discrepancies between the developed and the developing world. CARICOM supported the need to restructure the Department of Public Information, so that it could better fulfil its mandate as the main information and communication channel for the Organization. That exercise should be carried out in accordance with the principles of transparency and open consultations. The proposed establishment of a division of strategic communications should streamline the Department's work, along with the involvement of various substantive departments. The millennium development goals of the United Nations should, however, continue to remain the basis for the priority themes of the Department is work.

25. Although the holding of exhibitions to portray the United Nations message might be restricted by financial and other resource constraints, CARICOM advocated the use of creative approaches such as travelling exhibitions and the involvement of other agencies, as appropriate. CARICOM also commended the Department of Public Information for promoting international conferences and commemorative activities during 2002, and looked forward to more information about the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the signature of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

26. CARICOM was pleased by the programming provided by the Caribbean Radio Unit in the Caribbean, and welcomed the use of improved

technology and of linkages through the United Nations Information Centre in Trinidad and the United Nations House in Barbados. The overwhelming response from Caribbean radio stations had been gratifying. However, CARICOM requested the reinstatement of the Caribbean Magazine Programme, which provided an informative resource base for a wide cross-section of Caribbean society, and looked forward to the full implementation of General Assembly resolution 38/82 B, which would introduce full radio programming in Creole to Haiti.

27. CARICOM was satisfied by the level of support offered by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to delegations, in particular through the training programmes, and noted with interest proposals for the central oversight of the United Nations libraries and the development of a virtual library. It looked forward to the early creation of the multilingual electronic gateway, but, while supporting reductions in paper use, emphasized the need to make limited copies of documents available in hard copy. It also reiterated the need to make depository libraries accessible to the public.

28. CARICOM commended the Department of Public Information for its use of available technology to ensure the timely production and dissemination of United Nations publications, as well as savings, and supported the proposal that hard copies of publications should also be provided. It agreed that decisions about what documents to publish should be based on relevance and usage, and looked forward to the resumed operations of the United Nations Publications Board; more information would be welcome about its mandate and composition.

29. CARICOM supported, in principle, the rationalization of the regional information centres through the creation of regional hubs, but urged that the establishment of such hubs should be carried out on a case-by-case basis, sensitive to the unique needs and interests of each region, and after consultations with the relevant countries. It wished to reaffirm the importance of the United Nations information centre in Port of Spain, Trinidad, a vital link between the United Nations and the people it served; as well as the importance of establishing an enhanced information component in the Multi-Island Office of the United Nations Development Programme in Kingston, Jamaica; CARICOM remained open to dialogue, with a view to completing that process.

30. **Ms. Olivera** (Mexico) said that her delegation believed that the mandate of the Department of Public Information should be strengthened to include tasks that transcended the dissemination of information and involved garnering the support of the international community for the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations. Among the basic elements that should be incorporated were the Department's function as a link between the Organization and diverse sectors of civil society; its role in the search for strategic associations; the holding of joint events, and the promotion of education and training programmes on the structure, work, priorities and objectives of the United Nations. It was only with a clearly defined mission and objectives that a broad, coherent review of the work of the Department of Public Information could be carried out. Priorities should be identified on that basis, and not on the basis of cost. Her delegation stressed, however, that the main responsibility for that important process must be shared by the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information, and that the communications and information flow between them must be constant and transparent.

31. Mexico welcomed the work carried out by the Department in identifying and reforming such key areas as publications, libraries and information centres. However, it felt that the Committee on Information should evaluate information policies and activities so that the General Assembly could adopt appropriate decisions. Her delegation believed, for instance, that the role of the information centres should be improved by way of measures to improve the quality of materials and to enhance links to the civil society. Mexico agreed that resources should be repositioned so as to support information centres in the developing countries and, where possible, the establishment of regional centres; it nevertheless wished to analyse those proposals in greater detail. Finally, she stressed the importance of greater collaboration between the various entities involved in information activities, so as to better support the work of the United Nations.

32. **Mr. Fadaifard** (Islamic Republic of Iran), endorsed the proposed restructuring of the Department of Public Information to enable it to provide timely information to the public on the United Nations. His delegation believed that the Committee on Information should lead the discussions on the Secretary-General's proposals (A/57/387, sect. II.C), in consultation with Member States, and should define the Department's

priorities. Some of the Department's functions which were inconsistent with its core mission should indeed be transferred to other departments. Activities of special interest to the developing countries should be given weight in any new operating model for the Department and for the United Nations information centres in the field.

33. The activities of the United Nations information centres should be expanded in the developing countries, and they should continue to develop their own web pages in local languages; but in the developed countries, where the public had greater access to a wide range of sources of information, the cost of maintaining the information centres was in fact not justified. There, the proposed United Nations regional information hubs would be a positive initiative; but the advantages were less clear in the case of developing countries because of the importance of direct access to the sources of information, and a more flexible approach would have to be taken.

34. His delegation supported the enhancement of the United Nations web site, which provided information to hundreds of millions of people around the world; at the same time, a balance must be maintained between electronic publishing and traditional means of communication. It welcomed the proposals to improve the management and integration of the library services, with greater electronic access to the collections. Consultation with Member States, host countries and organizations involved would make the process of reform in those areas more successful.

35. **Ms. Ropke** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland, reiterated the commitment of the European Union to the freedom of expression and information, and recalled that the European Charter of Fundamental Rights provided that freedom of expression was a universal right regardless of frontiers, and that the freedom and pluralism of the media must be respected. Freedom of expression was the first casualty of regimes that failed to respect human rights; independent media was a crucial element of democracy building. Although technology was changing and reshaping ways of consuming information, and therefore challenging the distribution of public information, such media as the radio still reached millions of listeners throughout the world. The traditional tasks of the Department of Public Information therefore remained important. It was necessary to formulate policies to strengthen the Department's effectiveness and efficiency so that it could reach out to disseminators of information, especially the media and non-governmental organizations, using the latest technology.

36. Not all members of the human community were benefiting from the advances in information technology; millions of people, for whom the Internet was a distant dream, still lacked such basic needs as water, education and health care. The Internet could not substitute for poverty eradication programmes; nevertheless, developed and developing nations needed to work together to bridge the gap so that poor countries would not be left behind.

37. The United Nations must try to bring its important message to as many people as possible. The overall objective of the reform effort should be to enhance the effectiveness of United Nations information activities, and to develop new strategies for a changing world. It was essential for the United Nations to make information and communication strategies an integral part of the management of the organization. The European Union fully supported the role of the Department of Public Information; other departments as well must contribute to informing international audiences of the goals and achievements of the United Nations. Open, ready access to ideas and information was essential for democracy at the national and international levels. The web site, which would continue to grow in importance, could not be seen separately from the other activities of the Department. The European Union encouraged the Department to prioritize and apply its resources to ensure that the message of the United Nations was delivered using the right technology, addressing the correct audiences, and using the appropriate mix of communications tools. It was important to be aware that different audiences had different needs, and to differentiate among them.

38. An effort should be made to deliver global messages worldwide to local audiences. The European Union had noted a growing sensitivity within the Department of Public Information and other United Nations departments to the importance of multilingualism, and appreciated efforts to put information on the web site in the six official languages. The United Nations must ensure a

multilingual approach to the availability of public information, within budgetary constraints.

39. Invoking the celebration of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 2003, she recalled the basic principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was regrettable that in many countries of the world, a free press did not exist and the exchange of information was controlled and limited. The European Union strongly condemned the use of violence to silence journalists or otherwise obstruct their work; it also condemned attempts to control or influence the media with the aim of distorting or suppressing information and opinions, and the use of the media for propaganda purposes such as the incitement to ethnic hatred and violence. Finally, she said that the European Union mourned those journalists who had given their lives in all parts of the world.

40. **Mr. Al-Ziani** (Bahrain) said that freedom of speech was one of the main features of democracy, and helped guarantee human rights. Bahrain's National Labour Charter confirmed that all nationals had the right to express freely their opinions, to be creative, to undertake scientific research and to have a free press within the framework of existing laws.

41. Experience had indicated the important role that information played in development. The stunning advances made in information and communication technologies must not widen the gap between developed and developing countries. The United Nations must assume a central role in narrowing that gap by disseminating those technologies throughout the world, in conformity with the goals of the Millennium Declaration and General Assembly resolution 34/182. In that context, he recalled the recommendations made by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in November 1989. If the international community aspired to establish a new world information and communication order, one of the best ways to reach that objective would be to improve the communications infrastructure in the developing countries and help them develop their human and technical resources. He thanked the Secretary-General for establishing the United Nations Information Technology Service in order to bridge the technological gap between developed and developing countries.

42. The plan to merge the United Nations information centres with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field offices should be tried out first in order to avoid any negative impact on employment. The opinions of the host countries should be taken into consideration in that regard. The United Nations information centres had become a source of information to the public about the objectives and programmes of the Organization. They attracted researchers and young people. They needed to intensity their activities in order to disseminate more widely the United Nations message and role in the world and publicize economic, social and cultural programmes that would help to raise people's standard of living.

43. **Mr. Jon** Yong Ryong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the rapid development of information and communication technology was affecting political, economic, cultural and other activities and accelerating social and economic development, and as such would be an instrument in the achievement of the Millennium development goals of the United Nations. Yet the disparity between the developed and the developing countries continued to widen. The establishment of an equitable international information and communication order should be a top objective of United Nations public information activities. Certain groups had a monopoly on the means of information, which in many cases were made to serve the political purposes of individual countries and gave a distorted picture of the developing countries. Public information must promote understanding and cooperation among nations based on mutual respect and equality.

44. The developing countries should be enabled to participate actively in public information activities through the transfer of advanced technology, the training of experts and international financial investment to enhance their capabilities in the field. The Department of Public Information had made commendable efforts to build the capabilities of developing countries, and the Department as a whole should be strengthened and such activities expanded. In that regard, it was important to ensure impartiality and objectivity in United Nations public information activities and increase coverage of development issues.

45. **Mr. Kabtani** (Tunisia) said that the World Summit on the Information Society, which was to be hosted by his country in 2005, should help establish real partnerships between developed and developing countries in information and communication fields and bridge the wide technological gap currently existing

between countries, promoting growth. His delegation welcomed the forums that were planned with a view to ensuring the success of that Summit.

46. The United Nations played a crucial role in information and communications, a role that needed reinforcement in order to counter the hegemony of biased media groups. His delegation welcomed the restructuring of the Department of Public Information. That exercise should be carried out in coordination with Member States, taking into account the recommendations adopted at the most recent session of the Committee on Information.

47. **Mr. Elashi** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the tremendous information revolution should have a positive impact on all peoples, provided that truth was disclosed. Technical advances and the flow of information through the mass media should contribute to economic, cultural and social development and should help developing countries combat poverty, preserve the environment and protect human rights. What the world needed nowadays was information that enlightened people and broadened their minds. The world was divided into the rich who possessed knowledge and the poor who were ignorant. Advances in information technology had deepened the gap between developed and developing countries.

48. His delegation was concerned about the domination of the mass media by advanced countries, which were using them to serve their own ends. There was no objective reporting on international issues, especially the third world, which was victim to distortions and negative publicity. The mass media were dangerous if they were used to achieve dishonourable ends. The international community should establish a code of conduct for the media, characterized by justice and fairness, which respected the choices of people and their cultures, furthered their economic and social development, and focused on world issues.

49. Notwithstanding General Assembly resolutions 33/115 C and 34/182, the objective of establishing a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order had not been achieved. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's report (A/57/157) and stressed that the Department of Public Information should not emphasize electronic information at the expense of traditional audio-visual, video and print information. The latter should remain the main channels of communication for issues of concern to developing countries, such as the Palestinian cause.

50. While his delegation welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information to promote the United Nations message, it stressed that that message should include the struggle of the developing countries against poverty, disease, malnutrition and illiteracy. It supported the Secretary-General's efforts to strengthen the technological infrastructure of the Department and improve the United Nations web site, and stressed the need for parity for all official languages. It called for the publication of Arabic documents and information simultaneously with the other official languages.

51. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that three points should be stressed: the strengthening of the Department, the prioritization of issues and resource requirements. With performance and efficiency as the guiding principles, there should be no restriction of the Department's activities, particularly in areas that had proved to be of benefit to the developing countries. If the Organization succeeded in meeting particular needs of its Member States, it was performing well, and that criterion should ultimately drive the reform process. However, if the Department was to deliver efficiently, adequate resources had to be provided. To meet the challenges of the new millennium, the Department's technological infrastructure needed to be enhanced, but in a way which did not widen the existing gap between developed and developing countries and which preserved the interests of developing countries in the course of the restructuring. The Department's main vocation was to convey the message of the United Nations, without sensationalism but in a way that attracted a global audience.

52. The Department had done good work in operating the redesigned United Nations web site, judging by the number of visits to it in the past year. Yet, even as the Department continued to upgrade its technological capacity, traditional means of disseminating information should be maintained, for the United Nations radio and television broadcasts had successfully met the needs of their diverse audience. His delegation supported expanding the existing programmes in different non-official languages, in keeping with the current sentiments in favour of multilingualism.

53. In the area of peace and security, the Department had done significant work. In complex United Nations peacekeeping operations, the information component was vital for a proper understanding of mission objectives and capabilities. The two additional posts recently approved for the Department should further enhance its capacity in that respect.

54. The idea of establishing regional information hubs should be applied flexibly, taking into account the views of Member States and especially of the countries directly concerned. Clarification was needed on the amount of resources that would be released and how they would be utilized in strengthening the United Nations information presence in the developing world.

55. **Mr. Boisson** (Monaco) observed that it was essential to ensure that the fundamental right of the United Nations itself to information and its right to speak out for peace, development and other major issues were not in any way restricted, especially by devious means.

56. The performance of the Department of Public Information in recent months had been outstanding, and equal to the new demands on the international scene. Its coverage of the series of great world conferences and meetings held since April 2002 — on financing for development, on ageing, on children, on sustainable development — had been remarkable, and it had taken a dynamic, creative and humane approach that had spoken also to civil society. It was now even more important that the programmes and plans of action that had been the outcome of those major assemblages should be widely publicized as quickly as possible by the Department, working in close consultation with the operational departments, so that an informed world public could monitor their application internationally and nationally.

57. That task alone would require the reinforcement and consolidation of the Department, in its technological capacity as well. His delegation therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's proposals to that end, using available resources, but remained concerned about the issue of linguistic parity, for which only long-term solutions were proposed. An insufficient outlay of funds, and an organizational reluctance to increase the funding, had hampered the United Nations information and communication capacity that was so necessary in contemporary society. Member States should act to remedy this situation.

58. The Secretary-General's many proposals on questions relating to information were heartening. A greater emphasis on the work of all the operational departments would certainly keep both the general public and persons of authority in government and civil society regularly informed, but in the process the Department should take care to give comparable publicity to all areas of United Nations endeavour and achievement. The proposals for improving publications, library services and information centres stressed, among other things, improved technological availability; but those without access to electronic means should not be forgotten. The regional information hubs under consideration should be adapted to each regional context, and should emphasize the needs of developing countries.

59. The United Nations radio broadcasts continued to reach thousands of people, among them the most deprived and most isolated, and their outreach should be extended both geographically and linguistically. At the same time, the Department could consider providing material to national, regional or local broadcasters that would encourage them to feature the United Nations in programmes of their own.

60. **Mr. Dev Pant** (Nepal) expressed his country's satisfaction at the Department of Public Information's innovative steps towards rationalizing its public information activities, the expanded scope of the publications and electronic broadcasting, the enrichment of the web site and library services and increased interaction with non-governmental organizations. Yet the bitter fact remained that the majority in the world did not have access to United Nations information services; information on the United Nations was most plentiful where it was least needed, and vice versa. Little had been done to narrow the digital divide; his delegation hoped that the World Summit on the Information Society would make a breakthrough in that respect.

61. The Department must ensure wider dissemination of information, both geographically and linguistically; resources might have to be engaged for that purpose. It must play a more effective advocacy role for the implementation of existing initiatives and the launching of new ones. It must be more streamlined and adhere strictly to the General Assembly's mandates regarding public information in formulating plans for improving the United Nations information system, and

must place the interests of the poor and disadvantaged at the core of its initiatives.

62. The United Nations must continue to make the best use of the various modes of communication to disseminate its message far and wide. Radio was still the most accessible means of information in many developing countries with a low literacy rate, where print was not the ideal medium and where television was still a luxury. It was imperative for journalists from developing countries to be given the opportunity to benefit from the Organization's training programmes.

63. **Mr. Jaiswal** (India) said that his country attached great importance to the achievement of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order. In a compressed world, better and speedier availability of electronic information could contribute to economic and social development and help reduce poverty and improve the quality of life, while its unavailability could not but widen the digital divide. The Department of Public Information had an important role to play and its reorientation exercise could help correct the information and communications bias against the developing countries.

64. His delegation was particularly heartened by the enormous strides made in updating and expanding the United Nations web site and making it more user-friendly and by the expansion of the News Centre to include all six official languages. However, accuracy, impartiality and objectivity must be preserved and should not be sacrificed for speed. The *Yearbook of the United Nations* and the *United Nations Chronicle* were, respectively, an unparalleled archive and a stimulating publication on a wide variety of issues. Indeed, an Indian edition of the *Chronicle*, for circulation in Asia, was being brought out at no additional cost to the Organization. He hoped that similar approaches would be explored for other regions.

65. The United Nations Information Centres played a vital role in spreading to the peoples of the world the message of the Organization's relevance to their lives and he supported the Secretary-General's proposal to establish regional information hubs, which should optimize both the contribution and impact of the information centres. Other welcome developments were the modernization of the library services, the upgrading of the responsibilities of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library as the overall policy-maker and coordinator, and the plan to improve electronic access to United Nations collections and facilitate the transfer of paper collections to electronic files.

66. The question to be addressed was the extent to which the restructuring of the Department would meet the developing world's aspirations and succeed in correcting the current bias against it. The focus of any strategy must be developmental issues, which were the basic challenge for developing countries; the Department should do more in terms of highlighting critical development issues, and the Organization's work in addressing them.

67. **Mr. Datsenko** (Ukraine), welcoming the efforts to strengthen the Organization's communications function and the Department of Public Information, commended the efforts to update and improve the web site and make it more visually attractive. His delegation was particularly impressed with the redesigned News Centre, an excellent source of United Nations news and a gateway to a wide array of links to news of the day in an easily accessible and user-friendly format. The recently launched e-mail news service was highly valuable for supplying United Nations news to a variety of audiences, especially journalists and other media outlets, thus helping to bridge the digital divide and reach the public in countries where the Internet was not yet widely available.

68. The United Nations information centres maintained direct contact between the Organization and local communities. The information component of UNDP in Ukraine was effective both in terms of presenting a unified image of the United Nations and in enhancing information activities in major areas of the Organization's work. His delegation fully supported the integration of the information centres with UNDP field offices, which would make for closer coordination, as well as savings through the use of shared resources. Considering the opportunities that information and communication technology provided for many developing countries, adequate resources should be allocated to those centres, greater efforts were needed to narrow the digital divide.

69. His delegation welcomed the Department's efforts to enhance the public information capacity of peacekeeping operations and urged it to strengthen its role in the selection of United Nations peacekeeping spokespersons. It hoped that, during the observance of

the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, the Department would find appropriate ways of focusing the international community's attention on the Organization's peacekeeping efforts. The Department could play a central role in alerting the international community to a variety of issues of global concern, including the problem of Chernobyl. Ukraine supported the Department's efforts to reorient its activities for the benefit of all.

70. Mr. Helg (Switzerland) said that the diversity of means of expression in the United Nations system was an important concern for his country, itself multilingual and an active member of the francophone community. His delegation therefore welcomed the efforts to promote the two working languages and ensure parity among the six official languages in all fields of United Nations activity. Improvement of public information was an important element of the ongoing reform of the Organization.

71. Given the fact that the information centres in developed countries used up 40 per cent of available resources, his delegation endorsed the proposed restructuring of the information centres around regional information hubs, and was reassured to learn that restructuring of information centres and conference services would not detract from the capacities of the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna. The United Nations Office at Geneva could play a central role as the European hub, not only because it already possessed the necessary equipment and know-how, but because of its age-old tradition of multilingualism and the presence of a large number of specialized agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

72. The logic of an integrated, streamlined library system was evident. However, his delegation was concerned that the proposed measures could lead to increased bureaucracy, the creation of new high-level posts, or transfer of the management of the library of the United Nations Office at Geneva to the Department of Public Information in New York. Moreover, it firmly believed that the archives of the League of Nations, which had no historic link with New York, should continue to be managed from Geneva.

73. Information and communication technology was becoming increasingly important given its impressive potential for contributing to human development, and reaching out to isolated and underprivileged communities. However, the myriad initiatives which had been taken to put those technologies at the service of humanity lacked a focal point that would harness their potential synergy, while the digital divide gaped wider. That was the situation that the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society — which should involve all stakeholders — was called upon to rectify. Concerted action needed to be taken to develop the potential of the new technologies and forge a worldwide consensus and a collective resolve to share the benefits of the technological revolution and use them to attain the goals of the Millennium Declaration. The Summit must transcend structural and technological aspects and tackle institution-building, the contextualization of information, the protection of local content, cultural diversity and multilingualism.

74. Having very recently become a fully-fledged member of the United Nations, Switzerland intended to play an active role in information and communications, and, accordingly, would be seeking membership of the Committee on Information.

75. **Mr. Ouologuem** (Mali) said that the advent of the new information and communication technologies had brought about a radical change in the way people lived, and had created a digital divide between the developed and developing countries. One way in which the Organization could narrow that divide was to establish a new world information and communication order in the service of human development. To that end, Mali had hosted the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on the Information Society. Other regional summits could help bridge the gap and place the new technologies at the service of development and cultural diversity of humanity as a whole.

76. His delegation endorsed the proposals made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Africa Group on the improvement of United Nations public information policies and activities. Member States' participation, through the Committee on Information, in the discussions on the proposals for reform of the Department of Public Information and the regional information centres would help to enhance the Secretary-General's new vision of information. Despite the enormous strides made regarding the web site, unrestricted access to the Treaty Collection and the Official Document System would make for wider dissemination of the legal instruments constantly requested by Member States.

77. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's view that the establishment of regional information hubs must take account of the views of Member States; close collaboration between those hubs and Governments should contribute to the achievement of the primary goal of information in the service of development. However, it was for the Department to ensure that the information on the web sites of regional hubs was reliable. His delegation strongly supported the Department's efforts to strengthen cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

78. No society could function without information. Development would be impossible without sound, clear and equitable information that respected cultural diversity. In that context, the New Partnership for Africa's Development was counting on the Organization's support to disseminate its goals to the peoples of the developing countries.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.